



P'ariba di Brug

Exploring the sites of Aruba's eastern end

Two of Aruba's most noteworthy sights are the Quadiriquiri and Fontein Caves found on the outskirts of Aruba's "Sunrise City," San Nicolas. On the road to the caves, located just at the eastern end of the Arikok National Park is the Lourdes Grotto, a Catholic memorial constructed in 1958, in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the vision of the Virgin Mary by St. Bernadette of Lourdes.

If planning a day of exploring the island, particularly with a 4 x 4 or by ATV, these sights are a must for any itinerary, for a variety of reasons. Not only are they interesting for their glimpses into the true nature of the island, but also are a fascinating peek into island history, and the lives of the indigenous population of prehistoric times.

Traveling on the main highway from Oranjestad to San Nicolas, one will come to a roundabout just before the town, where you take the turn to the far left. Just after the Joe Laveist Ballpark, turn left, and then follow that road and the signs out of the "suburbs" and into the "cunucu" or countryside. The first site along the way is the Lourdes Grotto, where, if so inclined, is a place that begs a moment of contemplation. The 700-pound statue of the Virgin Mary was hoisted to its location by Father Erkamp and devoted parishioners, and every year, on February 11, the Feast of the Lady of Lourdes, there is a procession to the site from the Santa Theresita Church in San Nicolas.

Continuing down what will soon become a rough gravel road you will soon find the way to the Quadiriquiri Cave. Park Rangers attend visitors and are ready to lead them to the farthest and deepest ends of the cave with a flashlight. One of Quadiriquiri's most notable characteristics is the two large rooms that have openings to the sky, which provide plenty of light for exploring independently. The cave is very safe, and fantastical formations of stalagmites and stalactites that took eons to form await you.

Further down the road is the historically interesting Fontein Cave, the smaller of the two. Again, park rangers are present and happy to answer questions and provide an informative history of the cave. The walls of the cave are proof that graffiti is an age-old practice, whether by Indians from ancient times that used it for their ceremonies, or by one "P.K. Meyen," who scratched his name into the rock in 1830! The Fontein Cave provides a tangible piece of ancient Aruban history for visitors to investigate. Both caves are open to the public seven days a week from 9:00 AM until 4:30 PM.

From the Fontein Cave, one can then enjoy a relaxing moment at the lovely Boca Prins, or continue west, and deeper into Arikok National Park. If you are hungry and thirsty, there is a cozy little open-air snack stand located at the entrance to the cave, which provides some authentic island cuisine at reasonable prices.

A visit to Aruba is not complete without allowing a day to investigate the eastern end of the island, where beautiful beaches, quaint restaurants, and living history await you. Don't leave Aruba without exploring the "Sunrise City" and its environs to experience a true sampling of island life!